

# PANDEMIC POLICY DEMANDS

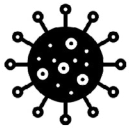
Unifor position on public policy needs, worker support measures

*Last updated on June 11, 2020*

## FEDERAL JURISDICTION

Policy demands that have not been implemented or addressed by government:

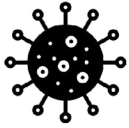
- Expand the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) to include new temporary emergency support to eligible employers that covers all monthly benefit plan premiums (on condition that existing benefit plans are fully maintained). This subsidy can be applied to workers on temporary layoff receiving the CERB;
- Immediately expand the scope of Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs, testing and vaccines when administered outside of an in-patient hospital setting, for those affected by COVID-19 as well as those without work who lack benefit coverage.
- Coordinate with federal officials to provide resources needed to cover all laid-off workers, with no access to private coverage, under existing provincial drug programs and waive all dispensing fees, premiums, deductibles or co-payments;
- Undertake the necessary consultations toward establishing a model of portable benefits for workers, particularly those in non-standard work, as recommended by the Expert Panel on Modern Labour Standards.
- Take immediate steps to begin implementation of a nationally-funded, single payer, Pharmacare program.
- Make the necessary regulatory changes to ensure unemployed workers, receiving the EI Emergency Response Benefit are eligible for Service Canada approved Supplementary Unemployment Benefit payments.
- Ensure the income security system remains agile to meet the needs of all workers in transitory times. Whether through Employment Insurance, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or other future measures, government must ensure workers have access to adequate income replacement, regardless of their individual return to work schedule;



## COVID-19 FLATTEN THE CURVE



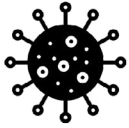
- Waive the one-week waiting period for regular Employment Insurance benefits;
- Temporarily standardize insurable hours qualifying rules to the lesser of 280 hours or 12 weeks, and deem time spent on an existing EI claim or CERB period as insurable hours for future claims;
- Eliminate the allocation of separation payments, one of the most punitive measures in Canada's EI system. Assigning severance and termination monies to the front end of an EI claim fails to recognize their distinct purpose as compensation for adjustment costs when workers must seek new employment;
- Expand the EI regular and sick leave benefit payment to replace at least 75 per cent of a workers earnings, and temporarily extend the time period for benefits beyond the 45 weeks limit, until such time as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Similar income replacement adjustments should be made with respect to the recently announced Emergency Response Benefit;
- Waive the EI regular benefit requirement for seven consecutive days without work or wages in the previous 52 weeks to provide workers suffering from reduced work-hours access to EI benefits;
- Increase the duration of EI sick leave from 15 to 26 weeks;
- Institute a minimum of 14 days of paid sick leave, for all federally-regulated workers, whether a worker has been formally quarantined by a health official, or been asked to self-isolate;
- Introduce special "income relief" measures for full-time and part-time workers in the health care sector (as was done during the SARS outbreak), who are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19;
- Provide special assistance to workers returning from maternity and parental leave who have exhausted their EI benefits and do not have enough hours to cover lay off benefits;
- Implement enhanced EI or other wage replacement measures (including through the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy) that accommodate those workers whose income is partially derived from gratuities, including those employed in hospitality, gaming, and the taxi industry;
- Expand the number of Service Canada staff in order to process claims in a timely manner. Staff should be hired and on-boarded immediately, given the extreme demands placed on the system;
- Suspend the requirement to repay EI Regular Benefits through the filing of an income tax return and based on the claimants net income, **currently** in excess of \$66,375, for the 2019 tax year;
- Suspend the requirement for EI claimants to conduct job searches and document their job search activities while collecting EI Regular benefits;



- Provide employees the option to accept a temporary layoff, and receive regular EI benefits, in order to offset the layoff of a co-worker. Such an option will be made available to employees throughout the COVID-19 crisis and shall be made available to union members covered by a collective agreement, upon agreement with the union;
- Ensure that recently announced federal mortgage relief efforts announced on March 18, 2020, including payment deferral, loan re-amortization and other special measures, is provided in equal measure to small business, non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations; and
- Automatically extend workers currently on Employment Insurance claims, including seasonal workers, such as in the fishing and forestry sectors, who have no work to return to. The extension should be for an indefinite period.

### Policy recommendations that government has made moves to address:

- Waive the one-week waiting period for EI sickness benefits;
  - **Federal Government announced this change on March 11, 2020.**
- Waive the hours requirement for EI sickness benefits and the requirement for a medical certificate;
  - **Federal Government announced on March 18, 2020.**
- Expand EI coverage to include workers who are caring for children affected by mandatory school, daycare and other child care facility closures;
  - **Federal Government announced expanded coverage on March 18 as part of new Emergency Care Benefit, renamed the Emergency Response Benefit on March 24, 2020, of \$2000 per month for up to 16 weeks regardless of whether the worker qualifies for EI or not. Applications made available in April 2020.**
- Implement emergency special income assistance payments to vulnerable workers, including precarious workers, and independent contractors, who otherwise would not receive EI benefits;
  - **Federal Government announced this on March 18, 2020, includes Emergency Care Benefit and Emergency Support Benefit, renamed the Emergency Response Benefit on March 24, 2020, that provides \$2000 per month for up to 16 weeks, regardless if the worker qualifies for EI or not Applications for both will be available in April 2020. Canada Revenue Agency will administer the program.**
- Ease federal Work-Sharing rules, to maximize eligibility, and enhance benefits to mitigate job losses especially within vulnerable sectors, such as tourism. The federal government should actively promote work-sharing across workplaces, and commit to accelerating the approval process;
  - **The Federal Government announced enhanced Work-Sharing and extended eligible weeks from 38 to 76.**



## COVID-19 FLATTEN THE CURVE



- Introduce special “income relief” measures for full-time and part-time workers in the health care sector, as was done during the SARS outbreak, who are more susceptible to contracting COVID-19;
  - **New Emergency Response Benefit measures apply to workers who fall ill, due to COVID-19. The “flat” benefit rate applies in equal measure to full-time and part-time workers, including those in the health care sector.**
- Service Canada must issue a directive to employers to code layoffs as “Layoff/Shortage of Work” instead of “other” to ensure no administrative bottlenecks prevent impacted workers from receiving money. Alternatively, Service Canada can establish a new special attestation for EI benefits, as related to “COVID-19” specifically;
  - **Service Canada has issued a directive to this effect. It appears at:**  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/notices/coronavirus.html>
- Automatically extend workers currently on Employment Insurance claims, including seasonal workers, such as in the fishing and forestry sectors, who have no work to return to. The extension should be for an indefinite period.
  - **Federal government announced on April 15 an expansion of EI/CERB eligibility to include coverage for seasonal workers, and those on expiring EI claims.**
- Waive the EI regular benefit requirement for seven consecutive days without work or wages in the previous 52 weeks to provide workers suffering from reduced work-hours access to EI benefits.
  - **Federal government announced on April 15 an expansion of EI/CERB eligibility to provide coverage for workers who continue to receive employment income, including those facing a reduction in work-hours, up to \$1000/month.**
- Expand the number of Service Canada staff in order to process claims in a timely manner. Staff should be hired and on-boarded immediately, given the extreme demands placed on the system.
  - **Federal government has established a dedicated payment facility to process unprecedented levels of EI and CERB claims, in a timely manner.**
- Institute a minimum of 14 days of paid sick leave, for all federally-regulated workers, whether a worker has been formally quarantined by a health official, or been asked to self-isolate.
  - **On May 25, the federal government (through the insistence of the Opposition NDP) pledged to advance talks with provinces to ensure 10 paid sick days per year for all workers in Canada.**